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UNITED STATES ATTORNEY

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I. **Introduction**

Good afternoon and thank you all for being here. My name is Tim Heaphy and I'm the United States Attorney for the Western District of Virginia.

We have asked you all here to announce a significant result in the case of a violent bank robber and fugitive from justice who embarked on a months-long crime spree last year. That crime spree is over, and this dangerous criminal is being held accountable.

II. US v. James Whittlesey

This morning, in US District Court in Harrisonburg, James Louis Whittlesey pleaded guilty to seven separate criminal charges stemming from a series of bank robberies that occurred last year and a charge of attempted escape that occurred more recently. I'll go through the charges and each incident in a moment. These guilty pleas and his prior criminal record will ensure that Mr. Whittlesey will spend the rest of his life in federal prison.

A) Winchester

On August 14, 2011 at 1:58 p.m, James Whittlesey walked into the United Bank on Berryville Avenue in Winchester with a .38 caliber revolver in his hand. He pointed his revolver at one of the tellers and yelled that "this ain't no BS game." He demanded money, specifically "big bills."

The tellers complied and gave more than \$10,000 to Mr. Whittlesey. He then fled from the bank. He was soon encountered by a

uniformed Winchester Police lieutenant who tried to arrest him. Mr. Whittlesey wasn't going to go down easily. Instead of stopping for the officer, Whittlesey used that .38 caliber revolver to fire at least four shots at the officer. Thankfully, none of the shots hit their intended target. He then jumped into his girlfriend's car, hit a tree and a parked car, nearly ran over a child who was in the street, and sped recklessly through the parking lot of a nearby school for special needs children.

Eventually the defendant crashed the car into a culvert and fled from officers on foot – we believe, through a drainage pipe. At the scene of the crash, investigators found the .38 caliber revolver, loaded with two live rounds and four spent casings. They also recovered approximately \$1,690 of stolen bank money on the ground near the wreck and a mid-Atlantic map opened to Winchester. Maps of Delaware and Maryland and the East Coast were recovered inside the car. Most of the other stolen bank money was recovered from his flight path and inside the bank as well.

Whittlesey kept running and ended up getting a ride to Route 81 and he eventually made his way out of the area.

He made it to Maryland where he stole a car on October 18 in Baltimore County and drove it north. The stolen car was recovered three-fourths of a mile from the Canadian border in Vermont on October 20, 2011.

The defendant was eventually arrested in Montreal, Canada on December 11, 2011. Whittlesey claimed to be a Canadian citizen and used a false name, however, fingerprints and tattoos identified him as James Whittlesey. He fought deportation, but was unsuccessful. Following months of court proceedings, he was returned to the United States to face justice for his crimes, justice that was swiftly and appropriately carried out this morning in Federal Court.

For his actions in Winchester, Whittlesey pleaded guilty this morning to aggravated bank robbery; brandishing and discharging a firearm during and in relation to or in furtherance of the bank robbery;

and being a felon in possession of a firearm. Whittlesey faces a mandatory penalty of life imprisonment on the bank robbery and firearms use charges because he qualifies for that serious punishment under the federal “three strikes” provision.

B) Fawn Grove, Pennsylvania

As I said earlier, Mr. Whittlesey has a long track record of committing very aggressive and very violent robberies in multiple districts. In addition to the Virginia charges, Mr. Whittlesey also pled guilty this morning to aggravated robbery charges for the crimes he committed in these other districts.

On July 19, 2011 at 10:50 a.m., Mr. Whittlesey walked into the M&T Bank in Fawn Grove, Pa. and pointed a revolver at two tellers before demanding money and yelling at the tellers that this was not a joke. He took more than \$6,100 during this robbery. He waived venue for this charge of bank robbery and pled guilty to an information filed by our district for that charge. That offense also carries a mandatory life

sentence.

C. Willow Street, Pennsylvania

On July 27, 2011 at 2:20 p.m., Mr. Whittlesey walked into the Citizen's Bank in Willow Street, Pa., and announced a robbery by pointing a revolver at the tellers. He demanded large bills and threatened to kill them if he discovered any "funny money" in the bag, and stole nearly \$4,800. For this conduct, he also waived venue and pleaded guilty today to one count of aggravated bank robbery, another charge for which he faces a life sentence.

D. Wilmington, Delaware

On August 12, 2011 at 12:40 p.m., Mr. Whittlesey walked into the M&T Bank in Wilmington, DE, brandished a revolver, threw a gym bag on the counter and said "no change, big bills, no BS," and ended up stealing almost \$11,400. He pleaded guilty to that bank robbery, originally charged by indictment in the District of Delaware.

E. Lemoyne, Pennsylvania

On October 7, 2011 at 12:15 p.m., Mr. Whittlesey walked into the M&T Bank in Lemoyne, Pa., displayed a revolver and demanded large bills and no “funny money.” He stole more than \$5,500 this time. This incident occurred just four days before he robbed the bank in Winchester. He waived venue for this final Pennsylvania robbery and pleaded guilty today to an aggravated bank robbery charge filed in our district.

F. Attempted Escape in Burlington, Vermont

On April 25, 2012, the defendant was deported from Canada and federal agents of the FBI and Border Patrol took the defendant into United States custody at the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Port of Entry in Champlain, N.Y. He was then brought to the United States District Court in Burlington, Vermont for his first court appearance in the United States before he was to be transported to the WDVA.

Agents placed the defendant in the back seat of a government-

issued SUV, with agents sitting in the front seat. As the SUV pulled into the side gate at the entrance of the United States District Court, Mr.

Whittlesey laid on the seat and kicked out the rear window of the SUV and began pulling himself out of the window, feet first. Unbeknownst to the agents, Mr. Whittlesey had managed to remove his leg irons, handcuffs, chain-linked belt and seat belt. As he exited the vehicle, the agents apprehended and restrained him.

Mr. Whittlesey pleaded guilty today to the attempted escape in Vermont, a charge originally brought in that District. For that offense, he faces up to five years in prison.

These charges are the result of a lengthy, dangerous crime spree. Mr. Whittlesey chose banks in three different states that were easily accessible by car from his Maryland home. Each of them unfolded in roughly the same manner - Mr. Whittlesey pointing the same .38 caliber pistol at a teller, demanding “large bills” and warning against the use of dye packs or “funny money.” In total, he stole nearly \$38,000 during

these robberies and put numerous bank employees, customers, and law enforcement officers in danger.

Beyond the robberies, Mr. Whittlesey demonstrated a desperation to avoid capture that led him to extreme violence. His act of shooting at police in Winchester was obviously very dangerous. We are fortunate that his plea does not include a homicide, as those shots could easily have hit their intended target or a bystander.

The police shooting in Winchester, Whittlesey's flight from the United States, and his attempted escape in Vermont demonstrate that this man would stop at nothing to get away with his crimes and remain free. He was ultimately stopped, however, by the fine work of a large number of law enforcement officers who have returned Mr. Whittlesey to a courtroom to face justice.

He can't run anymore, as today's guilty pleas ensure that Mr. Whittlesey will spend the rest of his life in federal prison. He's no stranger to prison, as he has previously been convicted of armed

robberies in Florida and Maryland. He committed the new offenses beginning less than two year after his release from a lengthy sentence stemming from one of his earlier robberies. Today's guilty pleas ensure that he will not be given that opportunity again.

IV. Law Enforcement Cooperation

Today's result would not have been possible without the cooperation of dozens of law enforcement agencies in different states and countries. This case is a prime example of the benefits of law enforcement at all levels.

Without the hard work of the Winchester Police Department and the Frederick County Sheriff's Office this tale could have had a much more tragic end. These two agencies kept the public safe as this armed and dangerous man shot at police officers on his way out of the area.

The FBI, Virginia State Police, Maryland State Police, and our partners north of the border, all worked diligently to investigate Mr. Whittlesey's crimes, locate him and bring him back to the WDVA to

face justice.

I am proud of the work of all the agencies involved in the apprehension and prosecution of this dangerous man. He will justly spend the rest of his life inside a Federal prison, making the streets of our cities and towns a littler safer.

Thank you all for coming today, we will now do our best to answer any questions you may have.